

February 24, 2023

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Neighborhood Music School regarding H.B. No. 6659. I know many of you are familiar with our work and have been strong advocates in the past. We are extremely grateful for your support over so many years and especially during these past few years of the pandemic. You are probably aware of the impact our school has made on arts education in our state since our founding in 1911, but I wanted to reiterate a few key points:

- Neighborhood Music School, known as NMS, is **the largest community arts education organization in the state, and one of the largest in the entire country.**
- NMS serves **over 2,500 students each year from 80-plus cities and towns** throughout the state, offering one-on-one lessons, group classes and ensembles, an arts-infused preschool, a middle school, and after-school and summer programs.
- Our commitment to **access** is exemplified by the **more than 500 students who receive financial aid, scholarships, and tuition waivers each year.**
- In addition to our main campus in New Haven, **NMS offers programming in ten satellite locations across the state**, including our newest in Vernon, Cheshire and Mystic where we bring Dance for PD classes into the community.
- NMS is one of the largest arts employers in the state, **employing 160 teaching artists and 22 staff members.** 99% of our employees live in the state, pay taxes here, and are sure to vote for arts supporting legislators.
- Our commitment to **diversity** is stronger than ever, and is evident in the fact that today, we have **the most diverse board and staff we have ever had in our 112-year history.**
- Our school is open 7 days a week, 48 weeks a year, with 36 classrooms, all filled for multiple hours of teaching and learning every day. Each year, we engage in more than **30,000 hours of instruction.**
- NMS partners with dozens of organizations ranging from schools and universities to cultural, educational and human service organizations around the state. We believe that these partnerships help provide an important network of support for our students.

While these facts illustrate the extraordinary impact that Neighborhood Music School has made on our state's economy and local communities, our student-centered arts education activities provide something even more important for our community. The wide range of students who come to NMS have a place to be seen and taken care of. What we do may look just like piano lessons and dance classes, but our programs support mental and physical health, and provide critical opportunities for students to develop life skills that help them be successful in all future endeavors.

I have been an educator for close to 30 years, and I have never seen so many alumni return to school to reconnect with their teachers and get the sense of home that only NMS can provide.



NMS is a place for students of all ages, races, backgrounds, levels of abilities and learning styles. Some of our students are on the autism spectrum, some are foster kids who have been in and out of DCF, some are non-binary or transgender, some are very elderly with serious health conditions. NMS is a home to them all. By bringing together people from different communities under one roof to learn, perform, and form lasting friendships we bridge differences. We are not *just* a community arts school; we support our students in every facet of their lives, meeting them where they are and taking them where they want to go.

Over the past year, as we have done consistently over the past 112 years, we have launched new programming. Continuing to adapt to this rapidly changing world and create responsive programming is an important part of our ethos. Here are a few examples of our latest projects:

- Our new **Creative Youth Development Initiative** focuses on building a support system for New Haven youth, helping them build agency, gain confidence, and effect change while creating their own original works. This tuition-free program includes our After-School Arts Academy, which brings NMS teaching artists into the community to work with NH Public School Students, as well as DELTA, our youth arts leadership program. and ATLAS Middle School, both of which take place in NMS's downtown New Haven building. Providing opportunities for youth to find their creative voices helps them imagine a future world worth living in, and provides them the skills to help create it. We are eager to grow this program in the years ahead.
- This past year, NMS completed work on **our new professional level Recording Studio** and launched **our own record label, Equitone Records**, dedicated to giving opportunities to artists throughout Greater New Haven who have traditionally been under-represented at NMS and in the recording industry. This exciting new initiative expands NMS's century-long dedication to arts education, performance, and access. In its inaugural year, Equitone Records will provide fully funded record deals to 10 new artists.

There is much more I could tell you about the work we are doing at Neighborhood Music School and there are many stories I could share about the impact we've had on so many lives. We couldn't have done all this without YOUR support and we can't continue to grow these important new programs and other initiatives without your INCREASED support. Currently, state support makes up just three percent of our budget, a much lower percentage than many of our peers. We urge you to consider increasing our line item funding, not just in recognition of the impact NMS makes on the state economy or in support of the remarkable number of students who receive financial aid, but because **we provide year-round learning, mentorship, and life-changing experiences for 2500 diverse students, one student at a time.**

Thank you for your time and consideration and all you do to make CT the greatest state in the country.

Noah Bloom

Executive Director, Neighborhood Music School